



# ***When Family Issues Become Safety Issues***

By 1stLt. Jonathon Richardson, USMC

I just had been scheduled for my first cross-country and looked forward to the experience. My wife was having chronic back issues (later we would find out it was three ruptured disks), but according to the Navy doctors, the back pain could be managed by pain medication. I was finishing my three initial intermediate-instrument flights and flight planning for this cross-country, while she was in agonizing pain and getting little sleep (which, in turn, kept me awake taking care of her).

Friday came, and the first brief and flight went well (I did inform the instructor of my wife's back issue). We landed in Virginia, and I settled into the BOQ to prepare for a weekend of chumming charts and flight preparation for the return trip home.

During the weekend, my wife called several times to tell me her back had gotten worse and the medication was not helping. We talked for several hours on possible solutions. She eventually went to the emergency room and was discharged later Saturday evening. I could not sleep well, and when it came to the brief, I

convinced myself that I could "suck it up" and continue with the flight home.

I did not tell my pilot the current update on my wife, because I wanted to get home (mistake No. 1).

We took off, and the flight to our intermediate destination went well. While waiting for fuel, my instructor overheard my student partner talking about my wife. The instructor confronted me about the issue, and I updated him on her situation. He counseled me about how personal factors could cause a safety issue on a flight and its crew, and never to let another crew member go on a flight not knowing the severity of my issues.

I called my wife to hear she was doing better with her pain. My pilot and I determined we could return home to complete the rest of the training. We landed late Sunday evening after an uneventful flight. From that time on, I always make it a point to tell the crew about any issue that could impact safety of flight.

Never think your problems are worth someone's life. Fess up; it's not worth chancing. 🦅

1stLt. Richardson flies with VT-4.